

The Tipping Points

Remarks at Baccalaureate by Judith Rodin, President of the University

Graduates of the Class of 2000, families, friends, deans, members of the faculty, Reverend Butts, and all honored guests: In song, in heartfelt words, and in prayer, we express the joy we all share on this beautiful occasion.

Graduates, today and tomorrow we will give you your hard-earned diplomas and a rousing send-off, filled with cheers, a few tears, and our wishes for a happy journey through life.

At today's Baccalaureate Service, however, those of us who have helped and watched you blossom into amazing young men and women feel a lot like your parents. We know you will move on shortly to start new lives, careers, and for many of you, eventually, families of your own.

But right now, we just want to hold on to you a little bit longer and try to tell you how much you have meant to us, how proud we are of you, and how much we will miss you.

I would like to share my own observations about this very special Class of 2000, and the lasting impacts it has made on this University. These young men and women made an immediately strong impression on me when I first met them at the Freshmen Convocation four years ago. I knew they were bringing superior academic credentials and an abundance of talents. That much was clear from their applications.

I also knew they would thrive in this enriched undergraduate academic setting that we had designed to fulfill the vision of Benjamin Franklin to unite theory and practice, knowledge and service, teaching and research. But it wasn't until Freshmen Convocation and the weeks that followed that I noticed other qualities that would make this a truly special class—qualities you don't always discern on an application: I saw students whose intellectual curiosity and appetite for learning would take them well outside their classrooms and individual schools to partake of the moveable feast that the Penn campus and Philadelphia offer. I saw students whose drive and ambition would lead them to engage their professors and their West Philadelphia neighbors as partners in learning and problem-solving. I saw students who could be exemplars for Dr. Franklin's ideals of "joining inclination and ability to serve Mankind, one's Country, Friends and Family." In short, I saw students who could have as profound an impact on this University as we hoped it would have on them.

In a *Daily Pennsylvanian* profile that fall, one of your fellow students—University Scholar Barbara Zaucer—captured this exciting sense of fruitful reciprocity when she said, "Penn is a university becoming. It's growing and developing now. So am I." How prophetic you were, Barbara! Against the tableau of this beautiful, vital urban campus, you and your classmates have grown and developed into a vanguard of young women and men who can connect what you know to real-world problem solving—because one way or another, you have already done it.

Many of you have made the connection by completing challenging academically-based service learning courses that enabled you to work collaboratively with your neighbors to improve the quality of life in West Philadelphia. Many of you have made the connection by taking the entrepreneurial skills you have learned in the classroom to help businesses grow and thus create more private sector jobs, which itself is a noble act of public service. Many of you have made the connection through your clinical work in hospitals and health clinics, or through your lab work as undergraduate research assistants. And many of you have made the connection by contributing your time, your voices, your ideas, your energy, and your talents to a myriad of campus organizations—from the performing arts and athletics, to campus publications, radio and television, to political and religious organizations. In short, you have done much more than study at Penn and master a discipline.

You have lived the life of a University that forces you to realize and express your fullest humanity as a citizen in our democracy. Now you are ready to till what our Commencement speaker Seamus Heaney refers to in the first of his *Glanmore Sonnets* as "opened ground." I would like to quote a couple of lines from that poem—because I believe they reach the heart of Penn's primary mission to prepare young men and women for meaningful lives of leadership and service. Dr. Heaney writes: "Now the good life could be to cross a field And art a paradigm of earth new from the lathe of ploughs." The image of an open field that will be shaped and reshaped by the cut of a plow is a wonderful metaphor for the opportunity each of you has to fashion a good life.

I know from experience—and I think my fellow alumni would agree—that Penn provides its graduates with the foundation for a good life. Our superb faculty do not just do outstanding teaching of their disciplines. What one student said in praise of geology professor Goma Omar, a

Provost Award winner, captures the essence of teaching at Penn: "I learned as much about life as I did about rocks." Our faculty truly do outstanding field work in life and go to great lengths to share their findings with their students. In that context, I firmly believe that your Penn education and Penn experiences will sustain and fortify you throughout your lives.

Indeed, your class president, Lisa Marshall, eloquently expressed how much Penn has done for her and her fellow students. But I would like everyone here to know how much the students have done for Penn and how so many individual acts have collectively had a lasting impact on the University and the community.

I think Malcolm Gladwell describes this phenomenon perfectly in his best-selling book, *The Tipping Point*. Gladwell defines "the tipping point" as "one dramatic moment ... when everything can change all at once," where new ideas, messages, and behaviors supplant old ones. Gladwell dismisses the notion that the world is an immovable, implacable place whose problems are insolvable. "With the slightest push—in just the right place," he writes, the world "can be tipped."

Over the past four years, I have seen a lot of tipping going on at Penn and throughout West Philadelphia. And we have tipped for the better.

Drawing on Barbara Zaucer's remark, Penn could not have grown and developed into the nation's preeminent urban research university without the creativity, the energy, and devotion to community that come from our students.

When students engaged their professors to blaze new trails of inquiry or reform the curriculum, that was a tipping point.

When students contributed their time and ideas toward enhancing all aspects of campus life, that was a tipping point.

When students in Professor Daniel Bogen's bioengineering seminar started inventing toys for disabled children, that was a tipping point.

When our men's basketball team won their second straight Ivy League title and our women's squash team won the national championship with an uncommon blend of athletic grace and class, those were big-time tipping points.

When students from all walks of life, disciplines and backgrounds came together to learn and grow at the Civic House or Writers' House, those were tipping points toward creating more dynamic communities at Penn.

Together, these tipping points illuminate a deeper truth: At any moment, an individual word or deed that is energized with love, thoughtfulness, compassion, and respect for others can do wonders. At any moment, you can be a decisive force for change because you can inspire others to accomplish great things. At any moment, you can bring people closer together to build and nourish beloved communities.

Penn is meeting its goal and obligation to be of West Philadelphia because our students have engaged that community in a spirit of mutually respectful listening and learning. Penn's campus has an energy and vitality unsurpassed anywhere because our students really have loved being here and treated their time here as a privilege and a blessing.

Perhaps the most profound truth of all is this: What makes Penn not only great but truly distinct is the loyalty and responsibility our students show to the future.

Think about it: Graduating seniors will not see or enjoy the fruits of many of their labors—such as an enhanced curriculum, campus life improvements, and a new wave of growth and hope in West Philadelphia. Nor will they be here to see the completion of the Class of 2000 walk through Perelman Quad, which will be funded with a class gift that shattered the previous records for generosity and participation. But future classes will.

Yet none of this seems to have diminished the pride and joy our seniors derived from their efforts. They knew they were serving future generations, including perhaps their own children. They knew they were giving back.

That kind of devotion, which every parent and grandparent here can understand, reminds me of something Mother Theresa said. She had taken her witness of love and healing to help the victims of famine in Ethiopia during the 1980s. A journalist asked her, "How can you tend to the sick and dying knowing you will not be successful with everyone?"

"We are not here to be successful," Mother Theresa replied. "We are here to be faithful."

That is what our Penn parents instilled in their children, and what we have tried to cultivate on campus: Faith in a vision of a better world that is based on a keen awareness of our universal responsibility and interdependency. Graduates, I urge you to keep that faith and to conduct your lives with love, compassion, and respect for others. Keep on tipping and pushing the world toward a better tomorrow. God bless you all.

The following remarks are those that Commencement Speaker Seamus Heaney intended to deliver, but due to the inclement weather he delivered a shortened version of his prepared speech.

Transcending Boundaries

The Commencement Address by Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney

The invitation to be your commencement speaker was a great honor but it made me anxious as well. How, I asked myself, can one person address a crowd of 25,000 and hope to establish any kind of worthwhile contact? The odds against it would seem to be high. As a poet, as a member of a large family, as the native of a small country, I know that shared historical experience and shared personal memories and even indeed a shared accent may be necessary before any really credible exchange can take place. I have always loved, for example, the story of the anthropologist who was doing field work in a community of the Inuit people living up close to the Arctic circle. Why, the anthropologist asked a wise woman of the tribe, *why* are all your songs so short? And the wise woman replied, our songs are all so short because we know so much. In other words, the experience of living as a single people in a single place, where each new generation follows the same old paths—such an experience produced a wonderful, enviable confidence about the reliability and the knowability of the world.

But that experience of living in a closely knit, ethnically homogeneous, hermetically sealed culture is everywhere a thing of the past. The Amish carriage now shares the highway with the Mercedes car; the Australian bushman may still go walkabout, but he goes connected up to his Walkman; the recluse in the beach-hut north of Sausalito may look like a beach-comber, but he is probably an internet millionaire, scouting his next coup, on his way home to cross the Silicon. Living in the world of the year two thousand means that you inhabit several different psychic and cultural levels at the same time. And the marvelous thing about us as human beings is that we have been provided with a whole system of intellectual and imaginative elevators that whisk us from floor to floor, at will and on whim.

In the nineteenth century, it was still possible for poets and visionaries to dream that the complications and distractions of modernity could be avoided. Matthew Arnold deplored what he called “the strange disease of modern life/With its sick hurry, its divided aims” and wanted to retreat into the rural beauty of the English countryside. In a similar mood, Henry David Thoreau was drawn to Walden Pond and William Butler Yeats to the Lake Isle of Innisfree. But nowadays, such retreat is hardly possible.

You can think about the change positively, of course. If retreat is no longer possible, its loss has been compensated for by boundless opportunities for access. Dreams of unlocking the sites of knowledge and power—dreams that used to be enshrined in the words “Open Sesame”—these have to a large extent been realized in the magic formula that goes *www.dot.com*. This is the world of globalization where one thing can impinge unexpectedly and often drastically upon another; so much so that we no longer have any difficulty in entertaining the theory that the shake of a butterfly’s wing in one part of the world is going to produce a tornado in another. And this is the world that commences for you in earnest after this commencement. Today is the moment of ritual separation from what was for a while a reliable and relatively knowable world. We can think of it as a rite of passage from the nest to the sky, from the dens where you were fended for into the fields where you will have to fend for yourself. No wonder there is an out of the ordinariness about this morning’s ceremonies.

There is a dream-like quality to every commencement day. But the veil trembles more mysteriously if you are graduating in the year 2000. It makes you wonder if the date is a destiny or an accident. A turning point in your life has coincided with a turning point in our era. It is like the moment when a tide has risen to its highest and then rests: everything is at the full and yet everything is volatile. And for the duration of this moment, you are held between two worlds. It’s like those few seconds when you pause and hold the pose, and are photographed standing between your parents and your professors.

Today, inevitably, many of you will experience this in-between condition. You stand at a boundary. Behind you is your natural habitat, as it were, the grounds of your creaturely being, the old haunts where you were nurtured; in front of you is a less knowable prospect of invitation and

Photo by Stuart Watson



Seamus Heaney

challenge, the testing ground of your possibilities. You stand between whatever binds you to your past and whatever might be unbounded in your future.

One kind of wisdom says, keep your feet on the ground. Be faithful to the ancestors. Remember the short songs of the wise woman. Another says lift up your eyes. Spread your wings. Don’t renege on the other world you have been shown. One kind of wisdom says if you change your language, you betray your origins. Another kind says all language is preparation for further language. All of you are likely to be caught between these conflicting wisdoms and indeed you are unlikely ever to be able to choose confidently between them, now or in the future. And so my

advice to you is to understand that this inbetween condition is not to be regarded as a disabling confusion but that it is rather a necessary state, a consequence of our situation between earthy origin and angelic potential. And I want to give you two images and then one question and one answer, in order to fix my advice in your minds.

The first image comes from Rome in classical times, and it has to do with the figure of Terminus, the Roman god of boundaries. Because I myself am from Northern Ireland, from an island where the border between the north and south of the country has created divisions, not only within the national territory, but within the national psyche as well, and because moreover there is a second, inner border in Northern Ireland between Nationalists and Unionists, I have always been interested in this god of the borderline. And in the *Oxford Dictionary of Classical Mythology* I once read—by sheer accident—that the image of the god Terminus was kept in the Temple of Jupiter, at a point where the temple was unroofed, open constantly to the sky. In other words, even Terminus, the god of limits, refused to recognize that limits are everything. The open sky above his head testified to his yearning to escape the ground beneath his feet. As Hamlet said, you can be bounded in a nutshell and yet count yourself king of infinite space.

So that is my first image for the way we are placed, as individuals and as a species, between a given history and habitat and any imaginable future. And the second image is as enigmatic and yet as readable as the first. This time it is an image of a boat in the sky, an image which I once put into a poem. The original story is told in the medieval annals of the monastery of Clonmacnois in Ireland and it goes like this:

One day the monks of Clonmacnois were holding a meeting in the church, and as they were deliberating they saw a ship sailing over them in the air, going as if it were on the sea. When the crew of the ship saw the meeting and the inhabited place below them, they dropped anchor and the anchor came right down to the floor of the church and the priests seized it. A man came down out of the ship after the anchor and he was swimming as if he were in water, till he reached the anchor; and they were dragging him down then. “For God’s sake, let me go,” said he, “for you are drowning me.” Then he left them, swimming in the air as before, taking his anchor with him.

I have been entranced with this story ever since I first read it, and I take it to be a kind of dream instruction, a parable about the necessity of keeping the lines open between the two levels of our being, the level where we

proceed with the usual life of the meeting and the decision, and the other level where the visionary and the marvelous present themselves suddenly and bewilderingly. We must, in other words, be ready for both the routine and the revelation. Never be so canny as to ignore the uncanny.

And finally, the question and the answer. This question and answer are my equivalent of a short song inherited from the ancestors. I learnt them when I was a boy at school, when I had to get my catechism by heart for the religious knowledge class. Question: Who is my neighbor? Answer: My neighbor is all mankind. I could comment on the significance of this, but I don't think there's much need to. So let me instead just repeat my two line poem entitled "The Catechism":

Q. and A. come back. They formed my mind.

"Who is my neighbor?" "My neighbor is all mankind."

These two images, and this question and answer, have a definite universal appeal, and are vehicles of enduring truths. And I have shared them with you this morning because of something I know and admire about the traditions and achievements of the University of Pennsylvania. It seems to me that the expansion of horizons and the transcending of boundaries are fundamental to the vision of a university like yours, a

university where the students come from fifty different states and 118 different countries, where the countries to inter-disciplinary studies has been of long-standing, and where the founder Ben Franklin refused to acknowledge the boundary that is presumed to exist in the field of education between everything that is useful and everything that is ornamental. No wonder then that student volunteerism and service-learning play such a large part in the work that is done here. And no wonder that there has been such a commitment by the graduates and faculty to the larger Philadelphia community, a commitment which was recently praised by the School District Superintendent, David Hornbeck, when he said: "What you see in service-learning is the walls falling away as the classroom becomes the wider community."

Class of the year two thousand, the walls now fall away in earnest and the classroom becomes the workroom of the wider world. Move about it confidently and freely. Remember that the anchor of your being lies in human affection and human responsibility, but remember also to keep swimming up into the air of envisaged possibilities; and to keep on finding new answers to the question that Franklin said was the noblest in the world, the question which he himself framed and which asks, "What good may I do in the world?"

The Imaginative Consideration of Learning

Remarks at Commencement by Larry Gross, Chair of the Faculty Senate

Graduates of the University of Pennsylvania's first class of the 21st century, I bring the congratulations of the Faculty to you and to your family and friends who have joined this happy occasion. You have earned a moment of celebration as you cross a threshold and commence a new stage in your lives.

Behind us is a century adorned by progress and marred by barbarism, and much of both can be traced to the human capacity for combining farsightedness and short-sightedness. The 20th century was the era of antibiotics but also of the atom bomb; of astounding technological invention but also of global pollution and ecological destruction. And the next century promises even more dangers and challenges.

The *terra incognita* of the human genome is being mapped as we speak. We stand at the threshold of a scientific gold-rush, but this is not only a matter of interest to scientists and venture capitalists eager to profit from their discoveries. We all have cause to be concerned because the territory that may be fenced off or despoiled lies at the core of human nature.

Universities are the crucibles in which the key discoveries of the past century have been shaped, and those of us who have made our lives within the academy, as well as those of you who have been passing through, must remain at all times alert to the moral dimension of the academic enterprise. The pursuit of knowledge is not a democratic enterprise, but the uses of that knowledge must be open to democratic deliberation. Knowledge, we are often reminded, is power, but we also know that power can corrupt, and it corrupts most when we forget that knowledge without accountability is morally bankrupt.

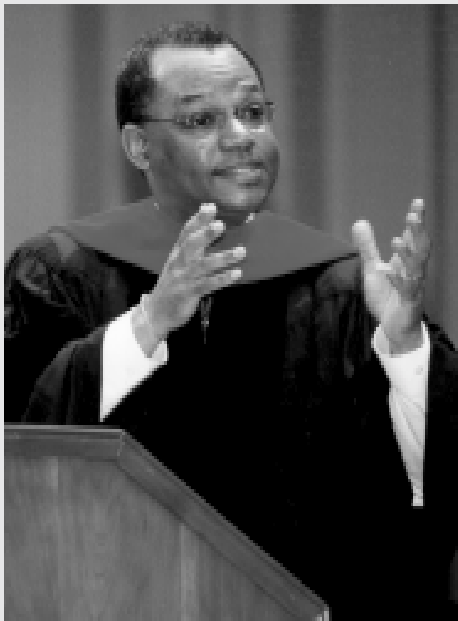
If we have been successful in our task as educators it is not because we have given you the knowledge you will need to confront the challenges of the new century, but because we will have encouraged you to ask tough questions, to treat conventional wisdom with suspicion, and never to accept a Final Answer.

Alfred North Whitehead wrote that "the justification for a university is that preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest of life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning. The university imparts information, but it imparts it imaginatively." And, he continued, "Youth is imaginative, and if the imagination be strengthened by discipline this energy of imagination can in great measure be preserved through life." If we have been successful we have exposed you to the contagious disease of imagination, but inoculated you as well with discipline.

I hope that you will never again speak the six words dreaded by teachers everywhere: "Will this be on the final?" For one thing, as Franz Kafka wrote in one of his notebooks, "it is only our conception of time that permits us to speak of the Day of Judgment by that name, when in reality it is a court in perpetual session." As you depart the protected groves in which you have spent these past few years, you are likely entering a world that does not measure time in semesters, nor accomplishments in credit units. You will have to grade your own work—and not on a curve—and you will have to set the standards that you will be judged by. If we have been successful, then these standards will include a commitment to concerns larger than the size of your paycheck or your office.

The philosopher Simone Weil wrote that, "If we know in what way society is unbalanced, we must do what we can to add weight to the lighter scale." This is a moral imperative that should be affixed to every university diploma, because you all—because *we* all—are the beneficiaries of such amazing and, frankly, such undeserved luck, in a world that contains so much suffering and so much injustice. I do not think that it diminishes in any way your accomplishments in arriving at this happy day, nor does it denigrate the support and sacrifices of your families and friends, to confess that we are among the lucky few to have the opportunity to pursue the imaginative consideration of learning. And our debt can only be repaid by our willingness to take stands—even occasionally by sitting in—to add weight to the lighter scale.

COMMENCEMENT/BACCALAUREATE 2000



The Rev. Calvin O. Butts, III, gave the 2000 Baccalaureate Address in Irvine Auditorium after inclement weather prompted the need to opt for an indoor venue rather than outside on College Green.

Ed Note: The Address given by The Rev. Calvin O. Butts, III, was not available in written form at press time. We will post it to Almanac's website, www.upenn.edu/almanac/, when it is available.



Photos by Stuart Watson

As the procession of some 5,000 Penn graduates passed the reviewing stand in front of College Hall, the Penn Quaker joined the dignitaries and others in applauding Dan Harrell, the decorated mop-toting, Palestra custodian who earned his degree this year. His tenacity and determination did not go unnoticed as he gained sudden notoriety on a nationally syndicated morning television show and in newspapers. During the past decade he has not only cleaned up the Palestra but has helped coach the Penn sprint football team in addition to taking night classes toward his bachelor's degree in American Civilization.

A number of other Penn staff also marched in the procession and earned an assortment of degrees through CGS, Wharton Evening, GSE, and the Center for Organizational Dynamics while holding down their full-time positions throughout the University.

Franklin and Friends:

Carrying on the annual tradition of visiting Ben on the Bench, early on Commencement morning, the honorary degree recipients joined their hosts near the popular, seated life-sized bronze of Penn's founder. President Judith Rodin was alongside Ben Franklin while Provost Robert Barchi was flanked by the six honorary degree recipients for 2000.

From left to right: Seamus Heaney, Ronald Dworkin, John Bahcall, Robert Barchi, Edward Rendell, Mary Douglas, and Wynton Marsalis, who were accompanied by Trustees Chairman James Riepe, far right.

